

9. THE JUNGLE CROW, *CORVUS MACRORHYNCHOS*
WAGLER, PLUCKING HAIR FROM TAIL OF COW
TO LINE NEST

It is a recognised fact that most of the crows (*Corvus* Linnaeus) line their nests with, among other material, mammalian hair (Ali & Ripley 1972; Lamba 1963, 1965). Lamba, in his account of the breeding biology of the Jungle Crow, quotes Hutton who states that 'human, horse or other animal hairs. . . . are sometimes pulled off the backs of live animals or skins laid out for drying.'

In February 1972, I watched a pair of jungle crows (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) investigating the tail of a cow sitting under a large jack tree on a farm near Bangalore at around 1230 hrs. One of the birds walked up to the bushy black tail tip and started tugging at the hairs. In a few minutes, it had pulled out a beakful of hair and then flew on to its unfinished nest on a nearby *Araucaria* pine. It was plucking out the hairs one by one and was accumulating them at the base of its bill, giving it the ridiculous appearance of sporting a gigantic moustache. I estimated that it had collected at least 30-40 separate strands of hair in the operation. The bird did not return for an additional supply of hair for the next hour. The cow seemed quite unconcerned with the crow and did not attempt to move its tail.

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10. BAYA (*PLOCEUS PHILIPPINUS*) FEEDING ON FROGS

On 8th May, 1973, while I was trying to collect some larks, I saw two parties of bayas (*Ploceus philippinus*) feeding at two different parts of a large paddyfield at Paddyadikol, Cherpu, Trichur District, Kerala State. In both places, two or more individuals were seen to

catch small frogs, which were plentiful in the paddyfield where the rice was being harvested. The frog was caught in the bill, carried to the overhead electric wires, battered to death and swallowed piece by piece. One frog obtained in the field has been identified as *Rana limnocharis*.

I do not know if such food habits have been recorded for the baya.

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11. SNAKE BITE CASE HISTORIES

- (1) May 24th, 1971. Medavakkam, near Madras.
Girl, 18, suspected krait bite, fatal. Sleeping on a mat on the floor of the hut when bitten on leg. Snake was killed and described as being long, thin and black. Girl was given "country" remedies but died before daybreak.
- (2) August 25th, 1971. Tambaram, near Madras.
Gurkha, Nepali night watchman, about 40 years old, suspected krait or cobra bite. At 7 a.m. men came rushing to me to say that this man had been bitten and died but could I somehow help anyway!? (This has happened several times). Watchman stepped on and was bitten at 1 a.m. by an unknown, "large" snake. His wife and he then sat around. By 3 a.m. the man succumbed. No help was sought, till morning.
- (3) January, 1972. Boy, 10 years, died possibly as a result of complications from bite of *Echis carinatus*. (see case 9, *Echis* bites).
- (4) May 26th, 1972. Madavakkam, near Madras. Friday morning—rainy, windy. 8 a.m. two men arrive with news of snake bite at Medavakkam (4 miles away on Velachery Rd.). I reached the hut 8.15 a.m. A crowd of people, mostly women were crying and yelling and beating themselves on the breast in anguish. The young man, of about 22, lay flat on back, arms folded, flower petals on eyelids, only light in the room was an oil lamp. No pupil response, no pulse, heartbeat or breath. The left lower leg quite swollen, with two obvious punctures below ankle bone. An Irla (tribal snake catcher) was digging around the hut trying to find the snake which was supposed to have been called cobra by the bitten man—he saw it crawl away in the moonlight. Possibly krait. It was as likely or more so that it was a krait since it is a common nocturnal prowler and seems less wary than a cobra; these "bites while